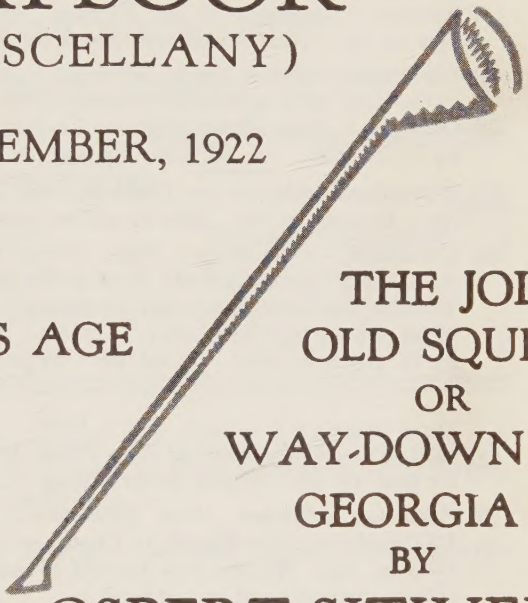
# THE CHAPBOOK

(A MONTHLY MISCELLANY)

No. 29 SEPTEMBER, 1922



THE POET AND HIS AGE

(An Essay)

By

RICHARD ALDINGTON

THE JOLLY OLD SQUIRE

OR

WAY-DOWN IN GEORGIA

BY

OSBERT SITWELL

ONE SHILLING NET

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# THE CHAPBOOK

## (A MONTHLY MISCELLANY)

Number 29 (Editor : Harold Monro) September, 1922

THE POETRY BOOKSHOP
35 Devonshire Street, London, W.C.1

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NOTE.—All MSS. receive careful consideration. Sometimes brief criticism is offered, but where they have not been accepted no further correspondence will be carried on regarding them.

# A Note on the Contents of this Number

By Harold Monro

THE Essay by Mr. Richard Aldington printed in this number was written as the result of a close examination of Chapbook No. 27. He came to the conclusion that those who answered the three questions then posed had not considered carefully enough the subject which they involved, and he set himself the task of thinking the matter out for his own interst.

Mr. Aldington seems to have a sort of definite, though qualified, affection for the poetry of his own time. He compares the present period with the two initial decades of each of the past four centuries. He comes to the conclusion that " the present time is undoubtedly rich in varied poetic talents, but the possessors of those talents seem unable to use them to the best advantage " ; that some of our poetry is " incoherent " and yet more of it " stagnant " ; that " the poets of this generation . . . have not yet been able to develop more than a fraction of their poetical potentialities," and that " future ages, looking back on us, will conclude . . . that when our poetry had order it was effete, and when it had vigour it was shapeless."

The lack of faith exhibited by Mr. Aldington in his examination of the poetry of our time indeed is typical of that poetry itself. Most of it is written in towns ; much of it by people who are not really sincere. A couplet occurs to me from Mr. Sitwell's satire which follows Mr. Aldington's article in this number :

> Now poet-journalists are busy men
> With only time for poetry now and then.

How cynical or frivolous is much of the more readable poetry of our time: but how gloomily dull are most of the productions of our more conservative and earnest poets ! The fact is that our poetry is, for the main part, the product not of belief but of " a nerveless religion without the sinew and bone of doctrine."

Yet, may Apollo defend us from the doctrinaires of the younger generation ! It is at them that Mr. Sitwell's satire is aimed. If anyone

is going to blame me for giving publicity to this rather vituperative document, I can only reply that Valour got the better of my Discretion. As a literary exercise the Eighteenth Century would certainly have turned it down ; but, as a kind of free and easy, rough-and-tumble hurly-burly, it is both amusing and informative.

Literary cliques and coteries have existed as long as literature has existed. Satire has always been considered a legitimate weapon for attack or defence. With some portions of Mr. Sitwell's satire, privately, I am not in agreement or sympathy, but, editorially, I think, on the whole, it is sufficiently vital as a statement, clinching as an indictment, and amusing as a lampoon to warrant its appearance in print.

It must be taken as an allegory. Too much consistency must not be looked for in it, and the author's apparently intimate knowledge of the private lives and habits of his characters must be considered merely as part of the joke. There are few acts more nearly criminal than the perpetration of bad jokes in literature. I feel quite confident, however, that nothing resembling a crime is being committed here.

There remain the questions of Good Taste and Fair Play. These subjects cannot fittingly be discussed in this Note. It is a kind of consolation to remember that a poet of the Eighteen-Nineties, having been told that a certain reviewer had written an unfavourable article about him for the press, replied: "I don't mind the least what they write about me, provided they do write something."

# Notes

*SO far, during 1922, four issues of THE CHAPBOOK have appeared, namely, two quarterly issues, on 15th February and the 15th May respectively, and (monthly publication having been resumed from July onwards) two monthly issues, on the 15th July and 15th August.*

*Monthly Publication will now be continued. Thus the total issue for 1922 will consist of eight numbers.*

*Those who are interested in the periodical, and desire to promote its welfare, are particularly requested to send 8s. 8d. to cover a subscription (including postage) for the current year.*

*The next number of THE CHAPBOOK will consist of a Collection of New Poems by contemporary Poets.*

# The Poet and His Age

IT may be plausibly advanced that the relation of a poet to his age should not be self-conscious, that he should neither deliberately reject the actualities, discoveries, the temper of his age, nor should he constitute himself their interpreter. The former was the error of the Romantic *à outrance*, the latter the error of the *Futuristi* and other schools and individuals now forgotten or obscure. But the Romantic attitude, even in excess, is more tolerable and less harmful because the material of poetry remains much the same in all ages and because it is almost impossible for any man to remain quite untouched by the fresh ideas current in his time. The poet, then, does not constitute himself the " interpreter of his age " ; he will draw his themes and perhaps his form from remoter times, but since he cannot escape, and ought not to wish to escape, the " spirit of his time," his work will be an expression of that spirit, according to his powers of intelligent comprehension and digestion. He will not to-day set out to versify as much as he can understand of Einstein, he will not compose " poems of Relativity," but the mere fact that he possesses this new knowledge will make him different from predecessors who had it not, and to that extent, but no more, will he " interpret his age."

The present age is one of ferment and incoherence, not a depressing and terrifying spectacle as some imagine, but rather a heartening symptom that we are reacting against the spiritual enemies of our race—stagnation and decay—and that we are attempting to assimilate many new ideas and to bring them into order and harmony. But that the age is incoherent (perhaps all ages seem incoherent to those who live in them and need the perspective of time for their hidden order to appear luminously) is no reason why art generally, or that branch of art which we call poetry, should be incoherent. A little of the poetry written in English, a good deal of French poetry and (if I am not misinformed) still more of German poetry, are now distinctly incoherent. On the other hand, a large proportion of recent poetry, particularly English, is stagnant, a repetition in a degraded form of something that has been done

better before. The reader is in both cases disappointed ; he feels that there is plenty of energy and intelligence and talent in the poetry I have called " incoherent," but it fails to become art because it lacks *ordonnance ;* while he feels that the order of the poetry I have called stagnant is arbitrary, artificial and unintelligent. The poetry which this hypothetical reader is seeking, which he is convinced can be written and will be written, has not yet emerged. Perhaps this is due largely to the erroneous conceptions of the art cherished by poets, to the fact that they have not clearly determined what is to be done, or, having determined, have arrived at a fallacious conclusion. The present time is undoubtedly rich in varied poetic talents, but the possessors of those talents seem unable to use them to the best advantage. They seem unable to put into their poetry all the fine things that are in their minds, so that it is far more interesting to listen to the conversation of modern poets (tête-à-tête, not in groups) than to read their poetry. Other observers must have been equally surprised that men so intelligent, so thoughtful, so sensitive, so variously informed should produce in poetry work which is so insignificant, abortive and timid. It is perhaps over-optimistic to think so, but I believe that (Shakespeare and Donne apart) we have nearly as many able and intelligent men writing poetry now as in the first quarter of the 17th century.* Our contemporaries have a far greater stock of notions and ideas than the Jacobean dramatists, or are more truly refined and have more delicate perceptions than the lyrists ; yet they are completely unable to compass either the abounding and vigorous fecundity of the dramatists or the exquisite grace and happy refinement of the song-writers. Are they " tongue-tied by authority "? For tongue-tied they, we, all of us, undoubtedly are. I do not mean that too little poetry is written (perhaps there is rather too much), but that the poets do not put into their poetry a hundredth part of the richness of their natures and of the abundance of their thoughts. Future ages, looking back on us, will conclude that we were either amiable and peddling or vapid and indisciplined ; that when our poetry

* This is certainly a preposterous statement, but I leave it as evidence, not of intelligence, but of good-will.

had order it was effete and when it had vigour it was shapeless. I am tempted to blame all this as much upon the ignorance, conceit and snobbery of audiences as upon the errors of the poets. The point is that this age might be, and ought to be, as rich in good secondary poetry as the Jacobean age, yet in spite of the bulk of work produced it is poorer in quality than that written in any of the periods 1600-1622, 1700-1722, 1800-1822 and only superior to that meagre poetic age, 1500-1522.

It is necessary to call a halt to this prolix digression and to return to the theme of the poet's relation to his age. That somewhat vague expression suggests a bewildering number of lines of enquiry. One might ask, for example, why it is that certain periods have been more favourable to the production of poetry than others ; why in the age of Elizabeth it was disgraceful for a gentleman to be unable to pen a sonnet, compose a song and sing it to the lute, while in the age of George V. no gentleman would be guilty of such acts and a poet is held to be a slightly ludicrous, if not ignominious figure. One might also investigate the relation between the arts and sciences, their analogies and differences, their apparent hostility. Or again, one might contrast the conception of poetry held by a writer in the age of Dante (when the " noble " topics for a poet were held to be War, Love and God) with the conception which a contemporary might have, seeing that we consider War disgusting and barbarous, that our theories of Love are largely physiological (we have all read Freud and Mr. Ellis), and that most of us hold that gods are made by men, not men by gods. Thus " heroic " war poetry, Petrarchan love poetry and religious poetry, if written to-day, run the risk of appearing merely artificial or unintelligent to educated people. Retrospectively we enjoy Homer, Petrarch and Dante, but we cannot hope to revive the heroic epic, the canzone of mystic love, or the vision of hell, purgatory and paradise. The imagination may be just as lively now as in the 13th century, but it must surely work along different lines, from different *données* and with a different framework. The vulgar notion that science has abolished poetry, that experiment has dispossessed the imagination, is untenable, for science finds itself surrounded by the mysterious. (Twice two does not always make four—we are told—and the spectacle of a

starry night which used to be propounded as an awe-striking evidence of providential order is now shown to present the appearance of relationships which have never existed.) But while the poet cannot and must not take the data of science as a theme, he ought not to be ignorant of the present deductions of scientists. One condition of science is that it is always being superseded, whereas art is not superseded. I have open before me an anonymous French song of the 13th century. The man who wrote it believed in the Trinity, the Primum Mobile, the diurnal motion of the sun, and probably held that unicorns could be captured by a pure maid ; most of us disbelieve these things, but yet we do not find the following lines anything but pleasurable :

Sa bele bouche tendrete
Que je soloie baiser,
Qui plus estoit vermeillete
Que la rose d'un rosier,
Soef con flor d'esglentier
Getoit une savorete,
Mès quant el ne m'a mestier,
Trop me semble mès fadete,
Et son cler vis
Mi semble descolorés et frois et paliz.

What do we conclude from this ? Simply that though science has altered completely since 1300, art has merely developed. The science of 1300 is now tedious and quaint ; its art is still enjoyable. Yet we must not conclude that the modern poet stands in exactly the same relation to his art as the mediæval *chansonnier ;* he may undergo the same experience, but it will affect him differently and be expressed differently. Here, for example, is the modern *chansonnier* on the same theme :

T'aimer, c'est beaucoup trop complexe
pour un poème. Affaire d'sexe
et d'âme et d'sexe et d'â . . . Mais les
Oh ! les femmes qu'on vexe !
—Je sens, chère, que tu me hais.

I shall not be so bold as to say that M. Pellerin's little poem will be as enjoyable in 2522 as the mediæval song is in 1922 ; it is an example of that unhappy incoherence I have been lamenting : but the two citations are at once a proof of the statement that the material of poetry remains the same and of the argument that the attitude of the poet, and hence his treatment of the material, must change. Heaven forbid that I should attribute to M. Pellerin's little piece a profundity he never intended, yet I think it no straining of truth to say that the attitude implied is harmonious with that expressed by him elsewhere, when he calls the human race a " dérisoire unité dans l'immensité planétaire "—a modern conception which was obviously impossible to the mediæval poet. I feel (if this is not spinning too finely) that the earlier poet is more comfortable and serene in his clockwork universe, wound up and kept running by an anthropomorphic God, than the modern poet who is tortured by a sense of human insignificance, by the frailty and brevity of all human affairs, and disturbed by the colossal enigmas involved in our conceptions of the universe. In this way and this way only does science influence the arts, in this way only can we admit " modernity " in poetry.

The instinct which has prevented most English poets of this age from running after Marinetti, to praise motor-cars or to grow hysterical over aeroplanes, seems to me in this respect healthy and admirable. It is worth recalling that themes of a similar kind were set by the French Academy for poets in the mechanical delirium which accompanied the promotion of railways ; all these works are now utterly forgotten.

There is much in Arnold's 1853 preface to his poems which appears debatable, particularly his insistence upon the purely classical idea of " noble actions " as essentials to poetry.* Nevertheless there is great wisdom for us in his words and we ought to weigh them carefully. I am particularly reminded of this preface in reading modern American poetry and criticism and, to a lesser extent, modern French and Italian poetry, particularly that of the

* Thus eliminating "personal poetry," like much of that written by Heine, Donne and Verlaine.

Unanimistes (so called), of Apollinaire and his pupils, and Marinetti and his pupils. The passage I mean runs as follows :

> They do not talk of their mission, nor of interpreting their age, nor of the coming poet ; all this, they know, is the mere delirium of vanity ; their business is not to praise their age, but to afford to the men who live in it the highest pleasure they are capable of feeling. If asked to afford this by means of subjects drawn from the age itself, they ask what special fitness the age has for supplying them : they are told that it is an era of progress, an age commissioned to carry out the great ideas of industrial development and social amelioration. They reply that with all this they can do nothing ; that the elements they need for the exercise of their art are great actions, calculated powerfully and delightfully to affect what is permanent in the human soul ; that so far as the present age can supply such actions, they will gladly make use of them ; but that an age wanting in moral grandeur can with difficulty supply such, and an age of spiritual discomfort with difficulty be powerfully and delightfully affected by them.

That, I think, effectually disposes of the wild west and aeroplane schools. Yet, lest by applauding that passage I should seem to approve other writers who are defective in a different way, I may point out that we cannot give the men who live in this age " the highest pleasure they are capable of " by—the words are Johnson's —" descriptions copied from descriptions, by imitations borrowed from imitations, by traditional imagery and hereditary similes, by readiness of rhyme and volubility of syllables."

In reflecting on another of the points touched upon, the relation of the contemporary poet to his audience, I feel, as I said before, tempted to blame the audience as much as the poet for the comparative ineffectiveness of our present poetic literature. It is impossible to deny that the artist is influenced by his audience. Even the sternest and most complacent self-critic must be a little moved by the reception of his works. I cannot altogether accept the proposal that the poet should write for " one hypothetical intelligent reader," because such cynicism wounds me and because poetry so

written runs grave risks of becoming too allusive and refined, unintelligible and uninteresting to all but the author and his immediate circle. It is class poetry, not national poetry—and how limited the class which consists of one hypothetical individual! And I am equally unable to accept the romantic conception of the "poète incompris," who sacrifices himself for a problematical posterity and solaces himself by reflecting upon his posthumous immortality. The classic examples of the "poète incompris" are either men who died very young or men who created an insurmountable prejudice against their names by excessive arrogance, eccentricity or vice. Moreover I do not know of any poets of marked ability who lived to the age of forty without receiving some sympathy and encouragement from competent judges. The quarrel I would lay upon the present English audience of poetry-readers, to whom in the first place a contemporary poet must naturally address himself for censure or approval, is that this audience is not very competent even at its best, that it applauds in new poetry precisely those vices of imitation and emptiness which Johnson so vigorously denounced. In other words, a writer who imitates skilfully some of the more popular of our poets—say Keats or Wordsworth—is more likely to be encouraged and applauded than the far more valuable, if more austere, poet described by Arnold. Popular authors sometimes complain that the public pins them down to one particular kind of book. "Disregard the public" is the immediate retort equally of the romantic and of the proud intellectual, but it seems to me (I may be wrong) that the poet injures himself when he "disregards the public" too obtrusively and too arrogantly. I cannot escape from the certainty that poetry is to give pleasure; and if it is giving pleasure to nobody, or to one hypothetical individual only, I see no reason for making it public. Probably it would be an advantage if poets generally published their poems first in periodicals (this is easy enough) and forbore to issue them in book form until they were convinced that enough people wanted them to justify publication. (I hope it is no great cynicism to say that the criticism a book of poetry receives from the press is usually so perfunctory and unintelligent that it is not of the slightest value to the writer.) But, just as I would exhort the poets to make every effort to render themselves

capable of giving " the highest pleasure " to their readers, so I would exhort their readers to be certain that what they ask from contemporary poets is truly the " highest pleasure " of original creation and not the comparatively base pleasure of skilful imitation. " On se lasse de parler dans un ouate," says Claudel, speaking of the complete silence which met his early books. I do not believe that there is any contemporary English poet of even slight merit who has not received encouragement, perhaps more than he deserves; there is probably more danger that a good imitative poet will be over-praised than neglected ; but as much cannot be said of the exceptional and original poet—one reflects how long Mr. Doughty's poetry lay in oblivion and wonders if the " Dynasts " would have been so readily accepted had Mr. Hardy not previously been known by his novels. In other words, I feel that the readers of poetry in England are in a state of mind common to many nations rich in past literature, that of applauding able variations on old work rather than genuine creation. Perhaps audiences have always been so ; at least I know that I have to struggle against the tendency in myself to prefer good imitative new poetry to more original and hence more disconcerting work. Moreover the almost inexhaustible mass of existing good poetry is a great temptation to neglect the more speculative pleasures of contemporary work. It is so easy to feel that one must not read Mr. Blunden now because one is still ignorant of Clare and Bloomfield. Nevertheless good contemporary poetry has an interest for us which it can never have for later generations, and we are thoroughly unwise and unintelligent if we take the rash stand that there is no good contemporary poetry. There is ; but may we not exhort the poets to strive to make their poetry still more capable of giving " the highest pleasure " ? And, as the poet's audience, ought we not to be careful that we do not esteem that which is less excellent above that which is more excellent ?

I do not know that any precept or recipes for perfection can be extracted from these divagations. I come back to my conviction, or rather feeling, that the poets of this generation, though rich enough in talent, well endowed spiritually and intellectually, have not yet been able to develop more than a fraction of their poetical potentialities. It is as if they acquiesced in the vulgar or popular novelist's

view that poetry is a kind of genial but unimportant game of a traditional kind, best left in the hands of amateurs and amiable dilettanti. It is as if the poets had deliberately starved their art, condemned it to the malnutrition of a perpetual imitation, not of life, but of itself. Yet it may be safely asserted that poetry is the most durable, valuable and pleasure-giving part of literature, that he who is insensible to poetry is defective in taste and incapable of experiencing the greatest pleasures which literature can give. The achievements of English poets in the past are so various, so considerable and so delightful that we might be pardoned if as a race we ceased to produce any more poetry of the first class or even of the good second class. The past two or three decades seem to us comparatively barren ; but they may not appear so in the future ; and, in any event, no race can produce a continual stream of masterpieces. There must be periods of repose as well as periods of production. In English literature it is generally the unexpected which happens, and (who knows ?) the next generation may see another outburst of poetry equal to that of the first quarter of the 17th and 19th centuries. But in any event there is no need to despair; the present generation has at least handed on the torch ; and a little more ardour and enterprise in the poets, a little more enthusiasm and discrimination in their audience, might create the rich period which we hope for rather than expect.

RICHARD ALDINGTON.

# The Jolly Old Squire
# or
# Way-Down in Georgia

## Being the Prologue to a Mime-Drama, with copious Notes by the Author, Osbert Sitwell

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

*A Goddess :* MEDIOCRITY.

*The Heroes :* JXXK CXLLXXGS SQXXRE, Poet and Journalist. Editor of the *English Hermes*.

EDXXRD SHXXKS, Journalist and Poet. Contributor to the *English Hermes*.

*The Villain :* SATAN.* Tries to read the *English Hermes*.

*Chorus of Critics, Journalists and Poets, referred to as the Squirearchy, or the Press-Gang.*

Stage Machinery : Shanks Mare—a thoroughbred.

* Mr. Hxrxld Mxnro has been specially engaged to impersonate the character of Satan at the first performance.

# The Scene

THE curtain, slowly lifting, discovers a cricket-ground, strewn with bits of currant buns, and empty ginger-beer bottles. Evidently the field has been left more in anger than in sorrow. The wickets are broken and half a cricket bat lies in the foreground. There is also an immense note-book lying open on the left, and there are copies of the *English Hermes*, the *Observer*, the *Ladies' Queen*, the "Literary Page" of the *Daily Herald*, an eight-year-old copy of the *New Statesman*, and several of the recent *Outlooks*.

From the trees surrounding the cricket-ground are suspended two enormous masks, hieratic masks of the heroes of the drama. In the centre is a big reading desk, supported on one side by an heraldic horse, on the other by an heraldic donkey. The desk represents a nest. Behind this, an unseen figure reads the Prologue in a loud voice, with occasional rests, during which a Drum and Fife Band, augmented by a few trumpets, plays a Triumphal March.

The Prologue informs the spectators of the dramatic event leading up to the drama possibly to be performed.

# Prologue

## PART I

Come, Tragic Muse, come near me, to inspire
This awful tale of poets and hell-fire,
Of fell cross-purpose, of how Destiny
Tangles the tentacles of Squirearchy,
While Mediocrity, though unaware,
Perils the poetry of her precious pair :
Of Satan, ever-plotting, let me wail,
To point the moral, and adorn his tail !
Disguised, outsprings he from a Chiswick roof
To give poor Shanks' Mare a cloven hoof,
Hid by that naughty Pegasus, until
She galloped once—both poets took a spill.
Tell me, till now, which Reader was aware
Of such high-spirit in that jog-trot mare ?

In Chiswick, neighbouring the Asylum Dome,
Is, naturally, the Nature-Poet's home.
Here, all unconscious of their imminent peril,
Assemble eminent critics—and the Devil.
Lovely and rustic is old Chiswick still,
But cultivated less by spade than quill ;
More rain of ink than rain of heaven flows,
*And Hawthornden more sweet than hawthorn blows.

* Refers to the Hawthornden prize of £100, which is awarded annually for the best piece of imaginative prose or poetry published during the year. The prize was first awarded in 1919. It has been won by :

(1) Mr. Edxxrd Shxxks—1919.
(2) Mr. Jxxn Frxxmxn—1920.
(3) Miss Wxlsxn (a novelist)—1921.

One only bird-song can their hearts assuage ;
When half-wit linnet tinkles from his cage.
Though feathered-fiends are absent, yet we know
That critics, too, can emulate the cuckoo.
Unfeathered cuckoos, these, alas, untarred,
They flutter and bow down before their Bard,
While wingless choristers here too abound
For Sqxxre's home is the pxxt's hunting ground.
Yes—Here dwells He : in yonder den he made
" Moon," " Trees,"* and " Rivers," on this blotting pad ;
In Dionysian fury did he scratch
†The first fine frenzy of the " Rugger-Match."
‡He opened in this home that " bottle of port "—
Oh, that it may have livened up his Court !

Blow, then, brave trumpets, blow ye bugles, blow !
You, " Hermes," and you, " Outlook," let ink flow !
§ Let Frxxmxn write crescendo, let our Shxxks
Pipe on his flute : let all give endless thanks
To Him Who Made them ! The triumphant pæan
Swells up from each and every magazine.
You *Georgian* Poets, prove your gratitude
With ever more redundant platitude !

* I apologise for my negligence in overlooking the fact that this particular poem is not by Mr. Sqxxre. I cannot, at the moment, alter, and destroy, the scansion of my line. Indeed, I could not feel sure, any way, to which of the two particular poets concerned I should be paying a compliment by attempting a revision.

† See Mr. J. C. Sqxxre's poem, " The Rugger-Match," in a recent issue of the *English Hermes* (edited by Mr. Sqxxre) for this line :
" Whistle ! a kick ! a rush, a scramble, a scrum,"—and a very good description of the poem, too.

‡ Another line from the poem quoted above : " And now I'll go home, and open a bottle of port."

§ Mr. Frxxmxn writes for the *English Hermes*.
Mr. Shxxks writes for the *English Hermes*.
Mr. Sqxxre is editor of the *English Hermes*.
Mr. Sqxxre and Mr. Shxxks both write for the *Outlook*.

*" Observer," how can Sqxxre score his own win ?
Blow, trumpets : let the second-man go in !
†You, I. A. W., you must wield your pen,
Adjust your spectacles and be a man.
‡Consider well the various works of Sqxxre ;
Prose, parody, consider : then admire
This new-world poem ! Why, its very length
Proves that your poet goes from strength to strength !

Yes, here dwells He ! Who knows but from this porch
He issues every Sunday out to Church !
Here by the scraper, well-manured with mud
§Of secret football, Tupperish Malud
Spread first its blossom. Here, the head-master's room
Where sometimes scolded poets sit in gloom.
Here comes the School to play, to quaff their pints,
To catch the tone, and take home a few hints.

Here come " Punch " poets ; (jolly loud they sing !)
And nature poets wander here from Tooting.
Here they meet other poets ; here they scan
(The only time they do) the other man.
Here poet meets his peer, then writes his praise ;
Each fans the other's glory to a blaze ;
Each star becomes a beacon, such its flashing ;
Each lives by taking in the other's washing.
Look ! there a *Georgian* poet dreams a play
To please Old Ladies in the U.S.A.,

* Mr. Sqxxre is chief literary critic of the *Observer*.

† I. A. W.: Mr. Ixlx Anxxrxn Wxllxxxs, a poet, who writes for the *English Hermes*, of which Mr. Sqxxre is Editor, reviewed Mr. Sqxxre's book of poems for the *Observer*, of which Mr. Sqxxre is chief literary critic. Mr. Sqxxre has now written a preface to an anthology edited by Mr. Ixlx Anxxrxn Wxllxxxs.

‡ See Mr. I. A. Wxllxxxs' review of Mr. Sqxxre's last book of poems in the *Observer*.

§ " The Lily of Malud is born in secret mud."

* Then turns to sleep, content that from his sires
He draws the blood of England's midmost shires.
In this chair, Shxxks first thought of " China's Queen " ;
†Wrote : " I am not so dull as I have been."
Here, too, come other protegés to dine—
Those poets true who never wrote a line.
Though now reviewers, they're the Muse's hope,
Come here to be ordained by Poetry's Pope ;
And HE, Infallible, may one day praise
The yet unwritten songs that they shall raise.
So now, in gratitude, they ne'er refuse
To psalm his present or his absent Muse.
One day they'll join the Apostolic ranks,
To equal (who knows ?) Txrnxr—Frxxmxn—Shxxks !
Here gather others, Cassius-like and lean ;
Poets they were—or hoped they might have been,
Now critics, having proved to their content,
(And ours), as poets, idiot—impotent !
Like billiard-markers, they must note the strokes,
Or, for a modest sixpence, guard the cloaks.
Goose-quill, goose-driven, ploughs its goosey way ;
Upturns a golden platitude each day.
Long-snouted, they, like pigs trained to find truffles,
Must rout about in rubbish for such trifles :
" Real Poet "—" Promise "—" Nature-in-her-Moods "—
" A poet to be watched : ' The Moorhen broods.' "
" What images ! What melody ! How clever !
‡Oh, that I might read on and on for ever !

* See Mr. Jxxn Dxxxkwxtxr's poem "The Midlands."

† See Mr. Shxxks' book of poems, " The Queen of China," which won him the Hawthornden prize in 1919.

‡ In a recent number of one of our leading literary periodicals a senior member of the Gang opened his review of the latest book of one of the junior members as follows : " Reading Mr. ———'s second volume of verse prompts the wish that one could go on reading his happy pastorals for ever, as though no other kind of poetry mattered."

Alms ! Alms, kind Sir, that I may fan that fire
Which in the end throws light on Mr. Sqxxre ! "

And there are geese, too, who are taught to fan
The air with borrowed plumage of a swan.
(" Only a sixpence, Sir, kind Sir ? Give more !
Then will I take the vengeance that you swore.—
' That other writer !—Oh, Mad !—Bad !—Negation !
Disgrace to Christianity and Civilisation ! '—
Thank you, kind Sir.") . . .
Meanwhile the Nature-crew,
Hymn every bird that ever croaked or flew.
Near by, Poetic-Mannequins display
The Spring and Autumn fashions of the day—
" We cannot recommend a thrush : it's over !
May we suggest a le-e-e-ettle golden plover ?
All our best birds have learnt the proper thing :
We've even taught the night-jar how to sing.
We train the partridge ; tame the moorland grouse ;
*Teach nightingales to sing quite near a house.
The chaffle of the yaffinch we can do.
No ? Why not try a passionate curlew ?
Bustard and buzzard both are fresh this spring ;
They say the Dodo, too, is coming in.
Have you read Frxxmxn's latest ? Oh, it's weird ;
So simple, and so grand : ' The Wounded Bird ' !
People don't like it. Then compare their faces
With one of his more serious grimaces ! "
†Himself is at the window catching flies,
While Txrnxr mumbles through dim tapestries
Of words, (both sides are seamy). Pxxrsxxl-Smxxh
Recites his " Trivia " to the Upper Fi'th.
Rxxkwxrd and Dxvxsxn, and many more
‡Sit silent, listening—or studiously pore.

* Refers to a recipe used with indifferent success in one of the recent volumes of Georgian Verse.

† No suggestion of inhumanity is intended.

‡ Pore—not bore.

Holding the latest " Hermes " into here
Stole Satan, suddenly. They know no fear,
Thinking him but another critic come
To join the chorus, thunder on the drum.

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## PART II

Now poet-journalists are busy men
With only time for poetry now and then.
Their noble days and nights, planned all to please,
Are passed in occupations such as these :
A cricket, billiard, or a marble match ;
A literary dinner, then a snatch
Of sleep ; then articles on literature,
Praising new pupils, C. of E. and pure
In verse as thought.—Blameless are they of mind,
Yet conscious of the Importance of Their Kind.
Each poem bears a label giving thanks :—
" For J. C. Sqxxre " ; " For Mr. Edxxxd Shxxks " ;
" For Bob " ; " For Robbie " ; " S. S." ; " H. M." ; " J."
For such is the young poet's pretty way.
At every Gangling's new poetic birth
Come " Hermes " and the twenty others forth ;
And the whole Squirearchy will go *Grand Slam*
By praise to make him, or, by silence, damn.
Each circumambient journalist enjoins :
" Alms ! Alms ! Kind Sir ! "—and pockets a few coins.

Thus having little time, press-poets plan
A few lines, three or four, and, if they scan,
Continue them in three months. On this day
Lay ten-score fragments written in this way,
Locked in the Squirearch's desk. But Satan ran,
Stole in, unlocked the desk as Satan can,

Abstracted one without their seeing,—instead
Put in this stanza by a poet dead :—
" A sensitive plant in a garden grew,
And the young winds fed it with silver dew,
And it opened its fan-like leaves to the light,
And closed them beneath the kisses of night."

Satanic laughter, like a monstrous storm,
Enveloped them, yet where the Upper Form
Clustered about its Master, none could hear,
None saw the flaming figure disappear.
Thus Satan, rolling horrid laughter loud,
Ascends and travels on a fiery cloud
To rob more honey from that other hive
On which industrious Shxxks is wont to thrive ;
And to insert the self-same verse that he
Gave Sqxxre. The latter all unknowingly
Opened his desk, read out the first found verse,
Pronouncing : " Might be better—Might be worse—
It's too romantic, and the title lacks
Simplicity. I'll double on my tracks.
According to my custom I will use,
(Help me to find the right one, Georgian muse)
Just one word, lonely, large, monosyllablic,
Simple and grand. A name inspires the fabric.
How shall I bring this title into line ;
How wring it to my only style—mine—*mine ?*—
I've got it ! Public ; Parsons ; Maiden Aunts,
Rejoice ! I've won my title—It is PLANTS.
My note distinctly, Oh, how well it goes
*With ' Moon '—' Trees '—' Rivers '—' Rugger-Match '—and
' Snows ' !

* I am in confusion again. Shall I retract " Trees " ? Is it by Mr. Sqxxre or by whom ? Alas, my ignorance !

Meanwhile our poet heroes do not meet,
For Shxxks lives in idyllic far retreat,
Though only forty seconds from a station,
So that his last, last posted inspiration
Leaves Clapham at 3.40—finds the door
Of " Hermes " and the—Messenger at 4 !
Here Shxxks on Mare's back, Shxxks by some sweet stream,
Narcissus-like, thought too upon the theme.
" When did I write this ? Strange, I don't recall
The mental process of its birth at all.
In it no bird, no night-jar, not a pheasant—
*It has about it something adolescent."
Yet—yet—these words (though distant as a star)
Seem, in a vague way, quite familiar.
There's too much reasoning. Verses of this kind
Should be quite independent of the mind.
Here lies my charm, my secret, my success,
A kind of hollow hallowed emptiness
That even Sqxxre might envy, that in vain
All other *Georgians* struggle to attain.
Come, Mother Mare's nest, you, my Peg'sus, come,
Inspire this verse, create a vacuum !
For, though we're told that Nature does abhor
The latter, nature-poets it adore.

Thus Sqxxre, thus Prefect Shxxks ; but neither thought
That Satan made their Pegasus his sport.
In that High Office where our Sqxxre holds sway
A regent sits—Jxxk Cxllxxgs is away.
The charabanc waits in Trafalgar Square
To waft a *Georgian* eleven, where
They'll find, in pleasure-grounds, impartial praise

* See Mr. Shxxks' description of Shelley's poetry as the " Poetry of Adolescence," in a recent number of the *English Hermes*.

Bestowed on cricket or poetic phrase ;
Bohemian Ladies ; an artistic Peer
To hand round currant-buns and ginger-beer.
Shxxks (no real cricketer) still rides, or dreams,
Narcissus-like beside the singing streams.
The others play at what they practise—all
In one, they're umpire, bowler, bat and ball !
These critic-poet-cricketasters catch,
Return the ball as in the poetry-match.

Let us go back to where a Regent rules,
And, such his hurry, gladly suffers fools.
IT goes to press, this solid work ; to-morrow
All's ready—but two poems that will follow.
One is by Sqxxre—the other is by Shxxks.
(Oh, country-rectories, ring out your thanks !
You, profiteers, sound forth with creaking voice ;
For culture cometh. Pay down, make your choice !)
But Satan's laughter, louder than them all,
Now rumbles through each subterranean hall,
For when the " Hermes " came, oh, what a fire
Blazed from the ever-righteous eye of Sqxxre !
" Vile wickedness, oh, moral turpitude
To steal, then publish for the multitude
My poem, Mine, My Own, My little lamb :
Ungrateful Shxxks ! No more I'll push your Pram !
You stole my Muse. To teach you not to steal her
I'll give you no more lifts in my Four-Wheeler.
Parnassus is a long way—Tired and hot,
You'll watch my 'bus-load pass you at the trot ! "

What curious fury seizes Shxxks to make
Him come to London, tremble, curse, and shake ?—

" Ah, villain ! Sensitive Plant, indeed ! Is't fair
To rummage in my desk and steal my Mare ? "
What tumult seized the multitude ; what sound
Shook Country-Rectory, and Pleasure-Ground ;
Echoed from hedge to hedge ; from floor to rafter :
What is it ? Can it—— ? Echo answers " Laughter."

Now in the Play which follows you shall see
The mighty Goddess Mediocrity
Contrive that naughty Satan's overthrow.
Meanwhile blow bugles, blow red trumpets, blow !

OSBERT SITWELL

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Printed by The Westminster Press, 411a Harrow Road, London, W.9